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CHANGING ATTITUDES: CONGRESSIONAL RHETORIC, RACE, &  
EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

By

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Thesis

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Changing attitudes: Abstract summarizing racially charged rhetoric in education

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Through an analysis of Congressional rhetoric regarding public school in the context of racial equality, three terms emerge as reoccurring concepts that drive discussions on contemporary educational conversations: *narrowing the gap*, *disadvantaged students*, and *accountability*. I have designed this study to determine whether the way politicians in U.S. Congress use these terms have racial undertones that ultimately work to maintain a culture of minority oppression. This study opens with an introduction describing my personal interest, followed with an extensive literature review regarding educational inequality. This study then moves into an analysis of the three key terms: *narrowing the gap*, *disadvantaged students*, and *accountability* through the lens of Critical Race Theory.

I found that while racist elements exist in Congressional rhetoric, evidence suggesting that these terms work as a unit to maintain concrete aspects of racial oppression remains questionable. When compared to narrowing the gap and accountability, the term disadvantaged as it is used in Congressional proceedings and on the No Child Left Behind website holds the most evidence for its role in contributing to racist undertones. Narrowing the gap may encourage the status quo among middle class white parents and students while accountability shows little evidence in terms of racist underpinnings.

I employ the perspective of Critical Race Theory throughout the piece to construct a consistent foundation. Critical Race Theory is a legal theory developed by scholars of color to address racism from an institutionalized perspective. Those scholars cited in this study include Derrick A. Bell, Allan David Freeman, Richard Delgado, Gary Peller, and Charles R. Lawrence, III.

I conclude that whites in the United States must constantly discern the difference between language commonly accepted as “politically correct” as it works to curb racism and language commonly accepted as “politically correct” which perpetuates racist attitudes. I call on this level of consciousness to avoid racist attitudes in educational rhetoric because it ultimately impacts children.

*“A segregated school system isn’t necessarily the same situation that exists in an all-white neighborhood. A school system in an all-white neighborhood is not a segregated school system. The only time it’s segregated is when it is in a community other than white, but at the same time controlled by whites. So my understanding of a segregated school system- or a segregated community, or a segregated school- is a school that’s controlled by the people other than those who go there... On the other hand, if we can get an all-black school, one that we can control, staff it ourselves with the type of teacher who has our good at heart, with the type of book that has many of the missing ingredients that have produced this inferiority complex in our people, then we don’t feel that an all-black school is necessarily a segregated school. It is only segregated when it’s controlled by someone from the outside. I hope I’m making my point. I just can’t see why, if white people can go to a classroom with no Negroes present and it doesn’t affect the academic diet they’re receiving, an all-black classroom can be affected by the absence of white children... so in my opinion, what the integrationists are saying when they say that whites and blacks must go to school together, is that whites are so much superior that just their presence in a black classroom balances it out. I can’t go along with that.”*

*-Malcolm X, 1963*

## Chapter One: Introduction

One of my most respected professors once mentioned that the debate over segregation and integration in public schools is not, nor has it ever been, the root of educational inequality (Dr. Lynne Itagaki, 2005, personal conversation). As a white American it is easy to look at school inequality as rooted in segregation. My immediate response to my professor was to think that if white students set the standard, wouldn't it be useful if minority students had access to the resources of white children? I quickly realized my ethnocentric impulse. Why are white children the standard? What she said makes sense. Minority students do not necessarily want access to white students, but rather respect, equality, and dignity. I used that automatic reaction to come to terms with what is really happening in our society. What does segregation look like now? Does it still thrive? After decades of civil rights struggle, why do inequalities persist? What is going on in politics that is maintaining the status quo? These questions compounded my outrage at the oppression throughout the United States and led me to this study where I attempt to dismantle the attitudes that have driven us to continue living in a culture of racism.

I attended the most "diverse" senior high school in my hometown of Pocatello, Idaho. I graduated in June of 2001 with 325 other seniors; the overwhelming majority were (and probably still are) white. In Pocatello, Idaho we have fully integrated schools. All students regardless of racial background<sup>1</sup> attend one of the three high schools. Pocatello High School boasts the highest number of minority students of the three high schools, the largest population being Latino. To venture a guess, when I

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<sup>1</sup> I have not included American Indian populations living on the Shoshoni-Bannock Reservation because this tribe manages their own school district and caters directly to Sho-Ban tribal members.

graduated, about 5 percent of the student body represented students of color (Pocatello High School, 2006). Although the school was “integrated” per se, beneath the surface of a casual small town high school surged racial tensions. There was a common attitude that Latinos equaled gangs, drugs, and teenage pregnancy. On the way home from school one afternoon, a friend’s mom told her not to “hang around any Mexicans.” In line with high school speech in the late 90’s, this friend replied with, “God, Mom, don’t dis your own race.” Ironically, she herself is Mexican American. In larger metropolitan areas these racial attitudes have led to whites fleeing racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in favor of majority white suburbs. It is no secret that in general, white students attend better-funded schools with more resources and with more educational opportunities than do their minority peers. Today racially diverse school districts in areas such as South Central Los Angeles and many regions of New York City offer teachers everything from extremely low-cost housing to subsidized higher education to teach in their schools (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2006). On the other side, highly qualified and motivated teachers often fiercely compete for opportunities to teach in racially isolated schools in wealthy suburbs where resources are guaranteed, parental involvement drives the school, and poverty is not a factor.

For the past fifteen years more or less, non-for-profit programs such as Teach for America, The New York City, Oakland, and Washington D.C. Teaching Fellows have worked to address teacher shortages in low-income areas across the U.S., on American Indian reservations, and in isolated poverty stricken rural areas where minority populations are high and where schools resources and quality teachers are

low. These highly competitive programs seek to recruit qualified individuals, particularly those of color, and place them in high-need schools for a minimum of two years (Teach for America, 2006). During this commitment teachers and fellows earn their teaching credentials through accredited and participating four-year colleges and universities in their local areas. In January, I applied, interviewed and was accepted to teach Secondary Spanish with the New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF) beginning in June of 2006. I will earn a subsidized Master of Education with a Spanish emphasis during the two year commitment from Pace University in Manhattan. Due to the substantial size of New York City's five boroughs, the NYCTF places each of the fellows in an instructional region throughout the city (New York City Teaching Fellows, 2006). I was placed in the New York City public school Instructional Region 10 which covers three different districts and includes Manhattan's Upper West Side, Morningside Heights, Harlem, Hamilton Heights, Washington Heights, and Inwood. Upon arriving to the area, I will be responsible for locating a middle school, jr. high, or high school in search of a Spanish teacher and interviewing with the hiring faculty to secure a job position.

The NYC Teaching Fellows' mission "is to staff high-need schools, primarily with teachers in high-need subject areas [such as Math, bilingual education, ESL, Spanish, and Special Education]" (New York City, 2006). This commitment toward educational equality and toward high expectations of all children, minority or white, particularly in hard-to-staff regions drew me to apply. While I do not seek to cure the ills of a racist society, it is my hope that my commitment to quality education particularly for those students most often marginalized will create a contagious

atmosphere of change. A move toward educational equality between all races remains a central aspect of education debates. In conjunction with my experiences in New York City public schools, I seek to understand the reasons behind school inequality as it applies to race. While it is easy to lament school funding and testing issues, no one is called to take responsibility for inequities. More importantly, few people stop to examine their own role in perpetuating racism. No longer are segregation and integration relevant, but rather, racism remains intact on a federal, systemic level evident in accepted “politically correct” rhetoric. These attitudes derived from constituents reinforce themselves on Capitol Hill and trickle down into the household vocabulary of the generalized American public.

What concerns me more than the worn out debate on integration and segregation is how educational discrepancies between minorities and white students continue to remain firmly entrenched. Public schools have become the battleground for social struggles already existing in U.S. culture. Within schools pertinent issues such as the pledge of allegiance, integration, and sex education play out as America watches. Perhaps schools are the window into what is actually happening because the population most personally affected by such issues is not necessarily the population fighting for certain ideals, but a vulnerable population: children. While we can look at public schools to watch the materialization of current attitudes, the root of education inequality lies not with the schools themselves, but rather with those with social power, those making policies, and those constituents dictating attitudes to Washington. Educational inequality and dramatic teacher shortages in high-need areas have come to attention of various non-profit organizations, educators, advocates,



and civil rights groups. While all work to combat these discrepancies, few specifically examine the problem from a systemic rhetorical perspective.

By using Critical Race Theory and basic knowledge of the U.S. educational system as a foundation to examine Congressional proceedings regarding public education, this study examines the language used in Congress regarding public education that demonstrates key attitudes working to maintain systemic oppression. These attitudes run throughout white American culture, and while it may be easy to lay blame on other whites or even on minorities themselves, if we are to strive toward equality, white Americans need to take personal responsibility by examining their speech and modifying it in such a way as to create a national environment characterized by awareness and dedicated to equality.

Problem:

Even following civil rights movements and national attention to education, minorities continue to receive unequal opportunities in public schools when compared to their white counterparts. This study addresses the problem of educational inequality by examining frequently used rhetoric in Congress and analyzing it through the perspective of Critical Race Theory. Educational inequality derives from a system problem and becomes a personal one, thus we assume that even our use of language perpetuates the very existence of racism. By examining Congressional rhetoric as it relates to education, this study seeks to expose inequality's deeply rooted presence in United States' public schools.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following literature review examines key white attitudes toward the question of race in American education by looking at several major court cases. It also explores the problem of social choice and *de facto* segregation within the parameters of Critical Race Theory.

Court cases:

Most “liberal” history books celebrate racial integration within public schools following the 1950’s Civil Rights Era. While we might understand that *Plessy v. Ferguson* meant separate but equal, and that *Brown v. the Board* initiated public school integration, what was actually happening outside the courtroom? *Brown v. the Board* was only one in a long string of civil rights and equal access cases brought before various courts across the U.S. that attempted to break down gross inequalities between Blacks and whites<sup>2</sup>. More importantly, de-segregation in public schools represented more than just education equity. Rather, *Brown v. the Board* was a landmark case for equal access to all services and facilities. According to race theorist, Derrick A. Bell, Jr. (1987) in the article, *Intellectual precursors: Early criticism of conventional civil rights discourse*:

By the early thirties, the NAACP, with the support of a foundation grant, had organized a concerted program of legal attacks on racial segregation... These strategies were intended to eliminate racial segregation, not merely in public schools but throughout society. The

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United States public schools are no less racially integrated in 2006 than they were 60 years ago (Lawrence, 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Other cases fall outside the basic scope of this piece, but would serve to provide a model for how the legal process functions as a method of controlling public policy in regards to racism.

public schools were chosen because they presented a far more compelling symbol of the evils of segregation and a far more vulnerable target than segregated railroad cars, restaurants, or restrooms (p. 6).

While *Brown v. the Board* is alone celebrated as an educational advancement, it was strategically used by the NAACP to assist American Blacks in gaining equal access to public goods and services (Bell, 1987). Bell writes that public schools were a “vulnerable target” because they presented a clear image of the evils of segregation (Bell, 1987). Bell fails to explicitly detail how public schools function as “vulnerable” targets; however, we note that no one living in the U.S. in the 1950s was more disenfranchised than Black adults, except for their children, who by the very nature of their childhood had limited voice and by the nature of their skin color, had limited rights. As America stood by, the debates of the nation fell upon the shoulders of Black children in public schools.

With the assistance of a few high school students in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957, nine Black high school students assumed the battle of the nation and the oppression of their race (Branton, 1983). While the National Guard stood by, the machine guns and uniforms did little to protect these students from the emotional trauma of contending with the bombardment of America’s fear and hatred. The first day of integration, the mob of over 1000 people became so unruly that the National Guard feared they would be unable to control them. The executive decision was made to quickly smuggle the Black students out the side door (Branton, 1983). Needless to say, the integrity of the academic environment was profoundly interrupted. These

high school students went on to live their adult lives psychologically traumatized yet their compensation is canonization in high school U.S. History textbooks<sup>3</sup>.

U.S. Supreme Court cases create the legal foundation of what drives civil society and by the same token reflect current attitudes and modes of popular thought. While *Brown v. the Board* represents the beginning of change, elements of *Plessy v. Ferguson* persist in white mentality today. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, presiding Justice Brown reasoned that responsibility for racial oppression lies with Blacks for developing an inferior identity:

We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. 3).

Brown implies that without a sense of an emancipated self, Blacks will continue to fulfill the expectations set out for them by prevalent white thought of the time. If Blacks “construct” their own oppression, whites theoretically play no role in perpetuating racism. Although *Plessy v. Ferguson* was handed down in 1898, attitudes driven by white oppression persist today to dictate that minorities are to blame for their own problems. While *Plessy v. Ferguson* is often cited as representing

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<sup>3</sup> In an eleventh grade high school textbook *The American Pageant* by Thomas Bailey, David M. Kennedy, and Elizabeth Cohen and used in many Advanced Placement U.S. History classes, the Little Rock episode consumes the space of two sentences under the chapter entitled “The Eisenhower Era, 1952-1960.”

past racism as rooted in the U.S. judicial system, it continues to speak of white mentality today. Justice Brown states in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that the law is nothing but a far reaching hope of harmony between Blacks and whites and that legislation “is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based on physical differences” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. 3). Justice Brown makes a valid point. Continued racial inequality present in the United States speaks not to the uselessness of laws but rather to the significance of white attitudes working on a local level.

*De facto* segregation and white attitudes:

White attitudes continue to drive the white American cultural landscape and today can be seen in *de-facto segregation* demonstrated through white flight. White flight as a phenomenon further contributes to racial segregation as white families move out of racially diverse neighborhoods and into predominantly white ones (Clotfelter, 1999). The freedom to choose where one lives is changing the historical concept of segregation. No longer are white schools denying access to Black students, but rather whites simply do not live in districts where Black children live (Clotfelter, 1999). This *de facto* segregation quickly has become the status quo throughout larger metropolitan areas across the United States. *De facto* segregation refers to segregation that cannot be directly linked to the state; thus, while segregation rages, the newest form of racism remains unquestionably legal, yet painfully immoral. The courts cannot direct residential migration to one area or another, or demand that a certain number of Black families move into a certain majority white neighborhood, or for that matter, demand that white families remain firmly planted in a majority Black area.

More importantly, white America needs to stop relying solely on the courts and the legal system to enforce racial justice without assuming a personal, local, and grassroots commitment to equality.

*De facto* segregation appears to have at least some remnants of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision which states that the initiative to desegregate must come from the citizens of the nation, not from the court. In the past, a number of school districts throughout the U.S. took it upon themselves to combat *de facto* segregation by busing racially diverse students from one district to another in an attempt to maintain integrationist ideals (Branton, 1983). As a result, minority students found themselves spending hours on buses each day, separated from siblings, their own communities, and everything familiar. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Miliken v. Bradley* (1974) broke down this technique of integration by deeming it unconstitutional. The *Miliken v. Bradley* case prevents most desegregation plans from moving students across district boundaries (Clotfelter, 1999). We then are left to ask: why not bus students from within school districts. In part, white flight has caused the majority of segregation to occur between districts rather than within districts (Lawrence III, 2002). Not only are schools themselves segregated, but entire districts boast mono-racial demographics. This increasing separation between the races speaks a great deal of the attitudes thriving in white America. The word usage of “flight” in “white flight” is no coincidence. White Americans are running. A cartoon image comes to mind of frightened middle class white Americans packing up the minivan, locking their doors, and racing through their middle class neighborhoods to a sterile gated community.

Accurate or not, the choices white families make impact the very development of contemporary race relations.

The battle for integration was not necessarily to encourage “mixing” between the races, but rather to assure equal access to basic public goods between Blacks and whites, as Bell (1976) points out in the article, *Serving two masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation*. Black parents of past decades assumed that without a number of white children (with politically influential and demanding white parents) attending school with their children, their children would continue to be denied adequate facilities, qualified teachers and updated, relevant academic materials. While integrationist movements focused on equal access, in the last decades of the twentieth-century and first six years into the twenty-first century, public school integration has proven all but effective in combating race-related educational discrepancies. Today few integrated neighborhoods flourish, much less exist (Lawrence III, 2005). In many ways, integration has been abandoned by social justice advocates who increasingly place more emphasis on examining the sources that have given birth to inequality such as attitudes manifested in white flight (Madden, 2002). Between long distances separating races, inflexible political boundaries, transportation, and basic access issues, forced integration proves to be a logistical nightmare (Krysan, 2002). While in the past “liberal” America relied on Black students to break down barriers, (Black students entering white schools, bussing Black students to white neighborhoods), civil rights activists can no longer use children as soldiers in a bigger debate. Minority children cannot be asked to sit on buses for hours everyday to travel to a predominantly white school (white= better),

nor should they be expected to seek out that “superb” education available to the white middle-class in suburban neighborhoods, but not accessible within miles of their family home. In the opinion of critic Maria Krysan, the idea that white schools are fundamentally better leads to a question of racial self-esteem in minority students.

With a list of rhetorical questions, she asks:

What effect does mandatory school integration accomplished by racial balancing have on these values and attitudes of Black children? What does a Black youngster learn when he is told that his all-Black school with its all Black teachers and administrators and his Black friends is not as good as the largely white school to which he must now go? (Krysan, 2002, p. 697).

Instead of claiming integration as a solution, civil rights leaders have turned their attention toward the root of the problem: white middle class attitudes.

My dad use to tell me that he admired Jimmy Carter more than any other U.S. president because President Carter sent his daughter to public schools in Washington D.C. He claimed that Carter supported his decision to send his daughter Amy to public schools with the idea that if they were good enough for the nation’s children, they were good enough for his own daughter. Of course, we could argue that Carter used his daughter as a pawn for his own political advancement, but nevertheless, Amy’s presence in D.C. public schools speaks to some extent of the last remnants of trust in the public education system. Today in Washington D.C. only 4.6% of the children attending public school are white (Lawrence III, 2005). Public schools in Washington D.C. are characterized as the “worst” public schools in the nation



(Lawrence, 2005). Would Jimmy Carter send his daughter to public school if he were president in 2006? Why is Carter the exception and not the rule?

In the legislative district of Washington D.C., the streets are lined with ivory. Year after year thousands of tourists spend days looking at publicly funded monuments and museums, taking pictures of their children on the National Mall and in front of the American History Museum. Where tourists fail to travel are those neighborhoods with public schools in desperate need. In the capital city of the world's hegemonic power, inequity seethes. We can be assured that most members of Congress attempt to "protect" their own children by sending them to private schools. While a Congresswoman might argue for equality and might politically advocate for excellent public education, she sends her own child to private school, neatly isolated from the "messiness" of race relations, poverty, drugs, violence, and, let's face it, mediocre education<sup>4</sup>. "High-need schools" continue to be the topic of social discussion, yet middle-class white America resists taking the ultimate action of sending their own children to minority populated, low-income schools.

The issue of white flight has been at the forefront of concerned American academics since the implementation of *Brown v. the Board* as American neighborhoods became suspiciously mono-racial. White middle-class families began citing concerns about neighborhood safety and concerns for their children's education. While most white people verbally deny their racism (Krysan, 2002), when a decision comes down to a choice between fighting racism and "sacrificing" their own children to integrated public schools, white middle-class families overwhelmingly chose

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<sup>4</sup> In part this comment is speculation based on the trend for wealthier or middle-class white families to send their children to private schools in lieu of public ones in major metropolitan areas.

private and charter schools (Lawrence III, 2005). While we cannot blame parents for wanting the best for their children, white middle-class families are in a position to use their white privilege to gain “the best” often at the expense of minority children.

Should we blame them? By the very nature of parenthood, regardless of race, parents want to maximize their children’s opportunities. High-need schools simply may not be the ticket into Duke or Yale. In the twenty-first century, racism has become not such a matter of court rulings, but continues to pervade the home. Racism is, in part, choice. Thandeka K. Chapman (2005) writes in the article *Peddling backwards: reflections of Plessy and Brown in the Rockford public schools de jure desegregation efforts*:

The reasons for the full-circle, 360-degree return to segregated schools in urban districts are both complex and simple. The changing political climate, the attack on social science research, the inability to measure racism and its eradication, the pervasive deficit model of students of colour and their families, and the economic deterioration of the urban city are all interconnected explanations as to why urban school districts have become even more segregated than they were 50 years ago (p. 30).

Chapman draws our attention to the deficit model of students of color. Social attitudes asserting that students of color may be in some way intellectually and culturally inferior to their white counterparts impact the very classrooms where their basic academic education transpires (Chapman, 2005). If white thought dictates attitudes of minority deficit, those attitudes play out in the expectations teachers and

administrators have for students of color. When expectations are low, students perform at a lower level, not because they are incapable of producing more advanced work, but because no one challenges them to do so (Teach for America, 2006). By this token, school quality decreases and parents become concerned. If we take Chapman's commentary one step further, I assert that to combat low expectations is not to remove their children from public schools, but for parents, teachers, and administrators to recognize that the root of failing schools with large minority populations is those attitudes espoused by white America. When middle class white parents make a choice to send their children to private and charter schools thereby vacating minority-populated neighborhoods, they succeed in unconsciously perpetuating racism.

Racial segregation occurs at varying rates depending on geographical location (Clotfelter, 1999). Western states had the lowest degree of segregation while Northeastern states had the highest degree of segregation (Clotfelter, 1999); however, we have to keep in mind the basic demographics of Western states. While California holds a practical majority/minority status, racial diversity outside of California state lines is sparse. In Western states such as Montana, Idaho and North Dakota, *de facto* segregation in and of itself would be almost impossible due to the extremely low numbers of minorities (U.S. Census, 2000). Schools with high minority populations simply do not exist in states such as the aforementioned, except for those on American Indian Reservations.<sup>5</sup> According to a study performed by Charles T.

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<sup>5</sup> American Indians remain "segregated," per se, on account of cultural preservation. The United States Federal government considers American Indian Reservations as a confederacy of nations in and of themselves. Thus, to discuss the impact of integration and segregation on American Indians falls

Clotfelter (1999) examining the existing patterns of enrollment in metropolitan areas, the most segregated cities in 1994 were Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, PA, and Baltimore, MD. Those cities where segregation was least severe in 1994 included Riverside, CA and San Diego, CA, while whites were exposed in greatest numbers to those students who were non-white in Los Angeles, Riverside, and New York City (Clotfelter, 1999). Clotfelter (1999) found that segregation was most severe where Blacks were the most numerous. Something is happening in white middle-class culture that is affecting not only schools, but the demographic development of geographic regions.

What attitudes do white families have that contribute to their flight into the perceived safety of the suburbs, or even to states such as Montana, Idaho and North Dakota? In the article, *Forbidden conversations* Georgetown law professor and Critical Race theorist Charles Lawrence III (2005) reaches out to the most integrated neighborhood in the Washington D.C. area, Shepherd Park, and records responses from parents about the education of their children in public schools. The parents with whom Lawrence III conducted conversations were typically educated and middle class and most often, white. He writes that the parents interviewed moved their children to less integrated schools not because they believed race was an issue, but rather because they unconsciously saw a link between race and educational quality (Lawrence, 2005). Parents are particularly concerned that their children will not be held to exceptional standards if they attend a majority Black school (Lawrence III, 2005, p. 1370). Lawrence goes on to write: “One of the products of racism and

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outside the scope of this paper, however, it provides an interesting contrast where race relations are in question to those schools with high Black, Latino, and Asian populations.

segregation is that poor black children are treated very differently than the children of highly educated white parents” (p. 1370). In other words, we deduct that the standards within majority minority schools are lower based not on the actual aptitudes of the students themselves, but rather on fundamentally racist attitudes that minority students cannot “make the grade”. John U Ogbu (2004) writes in the article *Collective identity and the burden of acting white in black history, community, and education*:

Expressive discrimination refers to White Americans’ beliefs that Black slaves were culturally, linguistically, and intellectually inferior to them; it also refers to the treatment of Blacks [today] based on such beliefs (p. 7).

As witnessed in the attitudes and actions of white middle-class Americans, attitudes about Blacks reigning from the era of slavery undoubtedly continue to weave themselves around the psyche of contemporary white culture. Without giving the decision of leaving a residential area much explicit thought in relation to race, white parents subconsciously subscribe to the idea that minorities are intellectually inferior and transmit that historical attitude to their children when they place them in majority-white public and private schools.<sup>6</sup> While “good” white people may be unaware of their racism, Lawrence III (2005) summarizes the need to examine our actions: “A fear of blackness is manifested in white flight” (p. 1364).

Hamilton Lankford and James Wychoff (2002) discuss similar attitudes likewise present in their study of segregation and parental attitudes, *The effect of*

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<sup>6</sup> This general assertion may be difficult to support given that there is little research regarding unconscious tendencies of parents in the ever “politically correct” environment of the U.S.; however, we can assume from the behavior of parents in school choice that some lingering social attitudes regarding the supremacy of the white race remain intact in a social subconscious.

*school choice and residential location on the racial segregation of students.* Parents of students often cite the attractiveness of enhanced educational opportunities for their children in relocation decisions (Lankford & Wychoff, 2002). But what is attractive? Fifty-percent of parents in 1995 reported making a relocation decision based on the quality of the school their children would attend (Lankford & Wychoff, 2002). According to Lankford and Wychoff, the attractiveness of a school decreases proportionately as the number of minority students (Black and Latino) increases (Lankford & Wychoff, 2002). In addition, over 90% of white students reported that they would choose to attend a public school if the majority of the student body were white; however, there is a 15% decrease in the number of white students willing to attend a public school that is comprised of a majority Black and/ or Latino student body (Lankford & Wychoff, 2002). Why these attitudes? More than a concern about education, evidenced in Lankford and Wychoff's study, school choice is not only the freedom to choose, but also the freedom to manifest one's own racial biases.

School choice:

Hamilton Lankford and James Wychoff (2002) cite two central problems that have contributed to racial segregation among public schools in their research. The issue of school choice first became a national question in 1925 with the U.S. Supreme Court case *Pierce v. the Society of Sisters* in the State of Oregon (Skinner & Kohler, 2002). During this period, the federal government attempted to close all private schools in favor of public schools. In a backlash against Catholicism, private schools such as the patriarchal school run by the Society of Sisters were under particular attack (Skinner & Kohler, 2002). Proponents of mandatory public schools envisioned

a “homogenous” American society and saw public schools as the breeding grounds for such a society (Skinner & Kohler, 2002). In the end, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of school choice (Clotfelter, 1999). Ironically, the decisions which ruled against institutionalized bigotry have today been manipulated to allow white children sanctuary behind the walls of majority white private schools in metropolitan areas across the United States.

Today, school choice includes the option of school vouchers, private schools, and charter schools<sup>7</sup> (Skinner & Kohler, 2002). In schools that are not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) established by the No Child Left Behind Act, parents now have the option of entering a lottery to send their children to schools with more educational advantages (No Child Left Behind, 2001). While in the context of an independent and private culture, it would seem almost anti-American to deny parents the choice of where their children attend school. Charles Lawrence III (2005) points out in *Forbidden conversations: On race, privacy, and community* that those parents who typically *make* a choice to move their students to an alternative educational setting are those parents who already have a social advantage, not those parents who are uneducated or struggling economically:

Where school vouchers [and charter schools] are concerned or out of bounds lotteries, it is those parents who are the most educated and with the most social pull who usually succeed in transferring their children. They know where to look for openings and they know how to work within the system to obtain what they want. They can petition and

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<sup>7</sup> President George Bush (2000-2008) has made school choice a central facet of his educational policies. The No Child Left Behind law has been a place from which parental school choice has exploded.

write letters and have more time than those working class, uneducated parents (p. 1360).

What Lawrence III (2005) infers in this passage is that those marginalized peoples find themselves increasingly ostracized as the system continually works against them. While they may be aware of “vouchers” and choice, Lawrence III accurately recognizes the real constraints of working class parents who simply do not have the time, the information, nor the political pull, to fight effectively for their children’s education.

Charles Lawrence III (2005) goes on to write that “the issue of racism is silent when school choice is the topic, and more importantly, when it comes down to personal choice and one’s own child. Race isn’t addressed and ‘privacy’ is respected” (p. 1355). While every parent desires the best for her own child, beneath the guise of parental choice, racism lies in wait. The attitudes that parents transmit non-verbally to their children and to society at large when they make educational decisions, entrench themselves in the very psyche of a nation and ultimately produce a culture of subtle bigotry. According to Lawrence III (2005), “school vouchers avoid direct confrontation of white America’s resistance to racial integration and the conscious, unconscious, and structural racism of which it is a manifestation” (p. 1381). Unfortunately, school vouchers and school choice are on the tip of every American’s tongue as the most recent educational reform No Child Left Behind act was passed in 2001.

No Child Left Behind:



Much of the current conversation regarding educational success, funding, and, the buzzword of the decade, “accountability,” centers around the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. Congress and President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law in 2001. NCLB was enacted in part in response to the superior academic successes of students from other industrialized nations, and as an attempt to address racial and educational inequalities (U.S. House, Ehlers, 10 May 2005). NCLB is the latest of federal education reform acts that works with the purpose of raising the level of education in both public and private schools across the United States (No Child Left Behind, 2001<sup>8</sup>). Levels of improvement and current levels of education are measured by standardized testing which are administered individually by each state in grades three through eight and again in senior high school (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Scores from the NCLB tests are broken down into subcategories which include: Limited English Proficiency, disabled, Hispanics, African Americans and American Indians (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Unlike previous standardized testing, NCLB is a “high-stakes” test, meaning that if a school does not adequately perform the federal government issues a series of consequences (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006). Sandra J. Altshuler and Tresa Schmautz (2006) describe the consequences associated with high stakes testing to include: restructuring, financial penalties, closure, and takeover of the school by the state or a private management company. These consequences led to additional pressures placed on students, teachers, and administrators, particularly in those already under-achieving and under-funded schools (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> Details of this law can be found at <http://nochildleftbehind.gov>. Information about NCLB found in this paper merely provides a base to understanding current dialogue about education.

In the article *No Hispanic Student Left Behind: The Consequences of 'High Stakes' Testing*, Altshuler and Schmautz (2006) point out that the very design of most standardized tests is bias toward white America, white culture, and white knowledge. Minority students have traditionally scored several points on average below their white counterparts; yet teachers often express frustration because those students whose standardized tests show them to be falling behind academically, may not portray any inferiority in the classroom. Because NCLB looks specifically at demographics when reporting scores, students, teachers, and administrators who receive standardized tests scores demonstrating the academic “inferiority” of a group of students, often transmit this very expectation in the classroom ultimately producing a self fulfilling prophecy (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006). Combined with lack of *de facto* segregation and lack of funding, minority students continue to struggle against an invisible systemic oppression that subtly works to reinforce stereotypes.

#### School inequities:

Schools throughout the nation boast huge discrepancies in the varying levels of education, quality facilities, and access to education materials in schools with high minority populations. In the book *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) writes: “Like most Americans, I knew that segregation was still common in the public schools, but I did not know how much it had intensified” (p. 3). He goes on to link this segregation not only to an ideal, but to a reality of inequality: “I often wonder why we would agree to let our children go to school in places where no politician, school board president, or business CEO would dream of working” (p. 5). Kozol (1991) cites various examples of the inequities silently running throughout American

public school systems, declaring, without surprise, that those students and families most deeply affected are Black and Latino. Kozol (1991) gives a case study of a predominantly Black neighborhood in East Saint Louis saying that the sewage systems in many public schools are so dysfunctional that the presence of raw sewage on school grounds is not uncommon. While some children look forward to a “snow day,” schools in East Saint Louis break for sewage days (Kozol, 1991). Kozol (1991) gives numerous examples of the decrepit states many “high need” schools find themselves in after decades of neglect.

“High need” districts and wealthy districts are a direct result of school funding (Neoechea & Cline). Methods of school funding vary from state to state and from district to district. The federal government spends very little in public school districts’ total funding; however, this has changed slightly with the No Child Left Behind law<sup>9</sup> (No Child Left Behind, 2001). States primarily assume responsibility for funding public schools, yet each state contributes varying degrees (Neoechea & Cline, 1996). For example, in Hawaii, 98 percent of school funding comes directly from the state (No Child Left Behind, 2001). On the other hand, in New Hampshire, only 8.3 percent of total school funding comes directly from the state. Where are local school districts finding the other 91.7 percent of funding in states like New Hampshire? Where the state and the federal government fail to provide adequate resources, local districts use various methods of compensating (Neoechea & Cline, 1996). The most common method of funding schools on a local level is a local property tax (Kozol, 1991). If a school property tax is, hypothetically, 2 percent, a house that is valued at

500,000 would pay 1,000 dollars in taxes that would go to the local school district. In neighborhoods where property values are lower, the amount of total money dedicated to public schools is proportionately lower. Low income areas are often forced to implement heavy local taxes for the basic upkeep of their schools (Neoechea & Cline, 1996). While low income areas may have heavy taxes, the catch is that local people must also fund the local police department, fire department and other public services (Kozol, 1991). Low income areas purportedly have higher crime and more fire hazards than wealthy areas, meaning that taxes must be proportioned to pay for all public services, not only for schools. Low income families and individuals often stagger under the weight of local taxes, but see little results for their effort (Kozol, 1991). Unfortunately, minority students are disproportionately represented in low-income areas and often bear the brunt of school funding inequities (Neoechea & Cline, 1996).

#### Critical Race Theory:

From where is this marginalization of minority children coming? While white middle class Americans often ignore the impact of their decisions on the children of minorities, we might look toward the law for a clue as to how inequalities function within the context of a legal system that guarantees liberty, equality and justice for all. Critical Race Theory provides us with a comprehensive interpretation of the way in which U.S. law has perpetuated attitudes and how it impacts minorities. It not only aims at understanding the subordination of people of color in the U.S., but more

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<sup>9</sup> The biggest criticism of NCLB is that public schools receive far too little funding from the federal government for the law to be effective. The result is merely to place more financial pressure on local schools.

significantly, it seeks to change the bond between the law and currently established racial power (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas, 1995).

Critical Race Theory arose from within the legal profession and was propagated by key minority voices in the legal field (West, 1995), such as prominent writers Derrick Bell and Robert Delgado. Critical Race Theory attempts to examine the “historical centrality and complicity of law in upholding white supremacy” (West, 1995, p. 1). More importantly:

[It] embraces a movement of left scholars, most of them scholars of color, situated in law schools, whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole (Crenshaw, Peller, Thomas, p. xiix).

This study will use Critical Race Theory in the context of school segregation and *de facto* segregation with the intent of grasping the extent of systemic oppression that has lead to deeply ingrained racist attitudes<sup>10</sup> within the context of contemporary white American society<sup>11</sup>.

If we are to use schools and educational policies as a window into the attitudes that run beneath the surface of everyday American routine, we can extract particular causalities of racism as well as particular insights into the argument for racial equity by using Critical Race Theory as a method of decodification. This study looks at two

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<sup>10</sup> Defined by Crenshaw, Peller, and Thomas in the introduction of *Critical Race Theory: Key writings that formed the movement*, racism is termed as an “intentional, albeit irrational, deviation by a conscious wrongdoer from otherwise neutral, rational and just ways of distributing jobs, power prestige and wealth” (p. xiv)

<sup>11</sup> It is of particular importance to recognize the history of those peoples of color in their struggle against systemic oppression; however, to recapitulate specific historical events and attitudes toward race goes beyond the limited scope of this paper.

public landscapes to seek out the nature of social attitudes as they are manifested in the general white public: Congressional proceedings and the No Child Left Behind website. It examines Congressional proceedings because it is in Washington that constituents' attitudes, desires, and prejudices assemble. To a large extent, Congressional representatives speak from the perspectives of those they represent. The NCLB law serves as a backdrop in a majority of current Congressional dialogue as related to education. The NCLB website is particularly important because it functions as an easily accessible link between policy, results, teachers, schools, and the general American public.

### Chapter Three: Research

#### Research question:

After lengthy study into educational inequalities I noticed certain phrases and terms constantly repeated across both race and party lines in Congress. This led me to the question: how are three of the most commonly used terms, *narrowing the gap*, *disadvantaged student*, and *accountability* used in Congress in the context of racism if we are to examine them through the lens of Critical Race Theory?

#### Research method:

To investigate the research question I examined Congressional proceedings in the Library of Congress. I used the government document search engine Lexis Nexis and THOMAS, a U.S. government sponsored website containing all documents found in the national Library of Congress. In Lexis Nexis I searched under *Congress Record and Rules*. In THOMAS I searched under “Congressional Record.” In both I explored records containing the following key words: *minorities*, *education*, *closing the gap*, *No Child Left Behind*, *accountability*, *equality*, and *disadvantaged*. I read through all of the Congressional Records in both the House and in the Senate and in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce containing any of the above key words. The years I initially examined were 2005-2006; however, to make the study more complete I returned to the search engines and using the same key words searched the years 1998-2006. In addition, I investigated the initial debates over No Child Left

Behind between 1998-2001, using the same key words except for *No Child Left Behind*. The NCLB title was not initially implemented. In addition to this base, I searched for debates falling within the years 1998-2006 regarding higher education to compare the rhetoric used in each realm. The key words I used in the higher education search included: *minorities, higher education, universities and colleges, accountability, disadvantaged, and closing the gap*.

I looked into the racial and political party backgrounds of all Representatives and Senators speaking about NCLB and educational reform whose comments are recorded in the Congressional Record. I examined racial backgrounds and political party affiliations through two websites: Project Vote Smart and Congress.Org. Both of these websites are run by non-for-profit organizations committed to maintaining the integrity of the democratic system by keeping the American people informed of how their representatives and senators vote in Washington. Both sites provide biographies, past votes, professional experience, issue positions, committees, and political experience. Project Vote Smart goes so far as to offer information regarding personal preferences such as one's favorite book.

To supplement the Congressional Record, I searched the No Child Left Behind website thoroughly to gain a sense of how the government communicates with the public about NCLB. On the website I kept a close watch on the featured links of the day over the course of March, April, and May of 2006. I also researched the following permanent links: *overview, stronger accountability, more local freedom, fact sheets, speeches, choices for parents and research and statistics*.



## **Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis**

### **Introduction:**

Congressional representatives are literally that: representatives.

Representatives “stand or act for another” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2001, p. 993) Thus, they are speaking as representatives, acting as representatives and voting as representatives. Representatives speak to appease their constituents and often act with the alluring possibility of reelection (Dr. Gregory Koger, Personal Conversation, 2006). While the democratic system is fundamentally intended to promote and sustain equality and choice among its citizens, white Anglo- Americans compose the majority population in the United States. With power concentrated in the hands of the majority, it is to the best interest of the “majority” of representatives to act with that demographic in mind; however, how they do so often is not easily discernable. While there are numerous altruistic and socially conscious representatives, when examining Congressional proceedings, we must keep in mind the purpose and the possible consequences of dialogues in Congress. Congressional conversations do not propose to create radical change, nor to unveil a newly discovered social injustice (Hauser, 2002). Rather, Congress seeks to adopt legislation using contemporary attitudes and trends to produce laws, policies, and reforms that reflect what the voting public says it wants. Perhaps the greatest political career catastrophe is to be labeled a racist in this contemporary age of political correctness. In 2002 when Hilary Clinton was accused of being a racist the American people tuned in waiting for her to

convince the nation she had been unjustly accused. (National Public Radio, 2002).

Participation in Congress is a constant ballet, each step threatening career obliteration.

Political correctness drives conversations and has become the hallmark of our times

(Morris, 2001). This constant tiptoeing around leads us to acknowledge the

significance of examining the slippage of language, where shadows of attitudes reveal

themselves but go unnoticed by the careless listener. Through the examination of the

conversations recorded in the Congressional Record regarding education, we are able

to detect subtle racist attitudes that mirror personal and parental choice within public schools.

Data:

The following graph shows the percentage of white Democrats, racial minority Democrats, and Republicans using the terms “narrowing the gap,” “disadvantaged student,” and “accountability” throughout Congressional conversations about education from 1999-2005.

Terms	White Democrat	Minority Democrat	Republican
Narrowing the Gap	96%	95%	92%
Disadvantaged Student	93%	88%	90%
Accountability	98%	97%	99%

If we examine the breakdown of who is saying what as demonstrated above in the table, Republican and Democrat, white and minority Congressional members employ almost identical language when speaking of education. Glancing the data, we

deduct that few differences exist between party members regardless of race. What we must keep in mind however, is that those who speak in Congress about education reform tend to be the same few key players. In fact, the consistencies we see from the data are limited to a select group of vocal Congressional members who remain entrenched in issues of education. While no blatant discrepancies between race and party lines surface in the data, we can examine the actual terms to extract the subtleties of the terms themselves.

Narrowing the gap:

One of the hot topics in contemporary education debates is the “gap” between the academic performance of minority students when compared to that of white students. The very initial debates leading to NCLB revolved around closing the gap. While the “gap” is measured by standardized tests which may be a fundamentally flawed method of examining the academic aptitudes of minority students, we can safely assert that minority students in general do not have access to the type of quality education which white students have (Kozol, 1991). The phrase “narrowing the gap” runs throughout Congressional discussions regarding the academic performance of minority and white students as is especially present in the debates over the No Child Left Behind act. On February 8, 2005 in the House of Representatives, Major Owens, an African American Democrat of the State of New York from Brooklyn was recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader. Owens stated that “The budget of the United States is a moral statement,” and went on to assert that “we have disparities which exist and impact upon the Black community” (U.S. House, Owens, Feb. 8, 2005). Within the first few minutes of his allotted time, Owens

quickly moved into the issue of equal education funding by acknowledging the differences in education between Black students and white students, essentially linking morality to the inconsistencies between Black and white students entering college and linking them to K-12 education:

African American college enrollment rates are 10 percent lower than white college enrollment rates. College graduation rates are even worse for African American students. Only 46 percent of African American freshmen ever graduate from college, compared to 67 percent of white freshmen. According to the Education Trust, the typical American college or university has a graduation rate *gap* between white and African American students of over 10 percentage points or more. A quarter of institutions have a *gap* of 20 percentage points or more (U.S. House, Owens, 8 Feb. 2005).

Owens used college graduation statistics of Black students and compared them to the college graduation rates of white students to demonstrate a 10 percent gap between the two groups in initial college enrollment. Owens eventually advocates for programs promoting college readiness such as Gear Up and TRIO that serve to “close the achievement and opportunity *gaps* in education” (House of Representatives, Owens, 8 Feb. 2005). While Owens discussed higher education, his ultimate concern was public K-12 education which becomes evident when he advocates for the existence of programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP in K-12 public schools. He uses the term “gap” in the sense that public schools have created an academic disparity between minority students and white students *before* college. These gaps are not only

noted in college enrollments, but we can assume they follow minority students throughout their adulthoods. Public education's negligence toward students of color not only creates a "gap" before their cohort turns eighteen, but rather it creates a gap throughout their lives.

Owens is not the only one employing the term "gap." In fact, it is used across racial and party lines. In support of No Child Left Behind, on June 13, 2005, Republican Tom Price of the State of Georgia and racially white, addressed the House of Representatives for one minute. Like Owens, Price gave statistics regarding the academic disparity between white students and Black students:

The achievement *gap* is narrowing as students in schools are held accountable for their performance... In 2002, 64 percent of African American fifth-graders passed the State math test compared with 86 percent of white students, a 22 percentage point *gap*. Now thanks to No Child Left Behind, 80 percent of African American students passed the test, compared with 92 percent of white students, a 10 percent improvement (U.S. House, Price, 13 June 2005).

Price explicitly praised the successes of No Child Left Behind by quoting statistics that demonstrate an improvement in the academic incongruity between the white and Black students.

Both Owens and Price spoke to the gap between African American students and white students, yet the very word "gap" implies the necessity to "narrow" that gap. Narrowing a gap suggests that both sides sacrifice part of the blank space and move toward each other. "Narrowing the gap" implies an equal movement toward the

center occurring between both extremes. If both sides relinquish something when the gap is narrowed, white students would theoretically sacrifice a part of their superior standardized test scores. It can be argued that narrowing the gap could mean white students remain the standard as minority students move toward that standard, thus white students would not sacrifice their academics while minority students move toward “white success.” Throughout all of the proceedings, testimonies, and hearings analyzed, there was little mention of how the NCLB law affects white children except for in one testimony by Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Superintendent of Richmond, Virginia public schools in a Capitol Hill Hearing Testimony: “five out of six subgroups showed increased performance during the 2004-2005 school year in both English and Mathematics. There was a slight decline by white students in mathematics” (U.S. House Committee on House Education and the Workforce, Jewell-Sherman 29 September, 2005,). If we look at Owens’ quotation of NCLB statistics and note the jump in minority scores compared to the minute increase in white scores, one could logically make the case that NCLB targets predominantly minority education. If we pair this assumption with Jewell-Sherman’s testimony of white students’ declining test scores, we can deduct that many white parents may begin to worry about their own children’s education. While most white parents, white Congressional representatives, and white students agree that the United States educational system has not supported minority students’ academic successes appropriately, few white students, teachers, and parents are willing to work toward closing the gap when their own and their students’ educational status is threatened. In other cases, white scores have been rising alongside minority scores, yet a

pronounced focus on raising minority scores may logically concern white parents who fear new educational reforms ignore their own children and that their children must thus suffer the repercussions of educational homogenization. “Moral” or not, parents will unquestionably advocate first for their own children.

Richard Delgado (1995) writes in the article, *The imperial scholar reflections on a review of civil rights literature* about the ways in which affirmative action has been supported in the United States. If we equate the concept of affirmative action with a “white sacrifice” we can use affirmative action arguments to examine the concept of “narrowing the gap.” Delgado (1995) writes that one way in which affirmative action has been supported is in retribution:

The reparations argument emphasizes that white society has mistreated blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics, and that it now must make amends for that mistreatment... A corollary of this perspective is that racism need not be remedied by means that encroach too much on middle- or upper- class prerogatives... If racial inequality is mainly the fault of the isolated redneck, outmoded ritual violence, or even long-abrogated governmental actions, then remedies that would encroach on simple conditions of life- middle class housing patterns, for example, or the autonomy of local school boards- are unnecessary... Self-interest, mixed with inexperience, may make it difficult for the privileged white male writer [or concerned white parent] to adopt this perspective or to face up to its implications (Delgado, 1995, p.50).

Delgado (1995) appropriately predicts that while most “moral citizens,” minority or otherwise, would consider themselves fair-minded and just, when asked to sacrifice a certain standard, they resist purely on the basis of selfish concerns. What white parent or white Congressman would fight relentlessly for a gap closure knowing their own children were to suffer? While the term “narrowing the gap” has integrated itself into “politically correct” circles, the fundamental implied consequences of this term leads to establishing a rejection of white retribution and undermines the very effort to close the gap.

The image of “narrowing the gap” is not the only consistently used term in Congress that may work to undermine minority rights. It is striking that politicians often avoid explicitly discussing race by talking around the subject. While race continues to be a central topic in educational issues, as seen in the very discrepancy in test scores between minority students and their white counterparts, politicians carefully avoid reference to specific racial inequalities in order to sidestep any political backlash. Legal critic Gary Peller (1990) writes in the article, *Toward a critical cultural pluralism: Progressive alternatives to mainstream civil rights ideology* that “The commitment to a race conscious perspective to many Critical Race theorists is dramatic because explicit race-consciousness has been considered taboo for a least fifteen years in mainstream American politics” (Peller, 1990). To avoid the “taboo” of race, politicians instead discuss the “disadvantaged” child.

Disadvantaged student:

The need to acknowledge the “disadvantaged child” lies beneath many education reforms but my question is, who is the “disadvantaged child”, what does it



mean to be disadvantaged, and most crucially, why is she disadvantaged? While Congressional representatives may casually use the term “disadvantaged,” the reality of what they mean when using the word remains concealed under a color-blind approach in “mainstream American politics” (Peller, 1990). Politicians are quick to note the success of No Child Left Behind by citing the rise in test scores among minority student populations such as we see in Owens’ flurry of statistics. In a one minute comment celebrating the success of NCLB, Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson, a Black democrat of Texas in the House on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2005 summarized the significance of receiving a U.S. Department of Education No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School Award. Blue Ribbon Schools “are those whose students achieve in the top 10 percent on State tests or schools where at least 40 percent of students from *disadvantaged* backgrounds sharply improve their performance on state tests” (U.S. House, Johnson, 1 November 2005). What exactly constitutes a disadvantaged background? On the U.S. Government No Child Left Behind website, the definition of a “disadvantaged student” is she who is *economically* disadvantaged; however, the website rarely refers to students as “economically disadvantaged,” but instead calls them merely “disadvantaged.” The term “disadvantaged” has become blurred and increasingly, politicians refer to “disadvantaged” children to include not only the economically disadvantaged but minority children as well, thus making them “racially disadvantaged.” The idea that one is racially disadvantaged speaks to the very perception that to be anything other than white is a deficit. Certainly Representative Johnson had nothing farther from her

mind, but she inadvertently succeeded in pairing disadvantage with minority status by avoiding reference to race.

In a speech given by white Republican Representative Castle from Delaware in the House of Representatives, he first states: “Poor and minority children still lag well behind the educational curve” (U.S. House, Castle, 10 May 2005). Not two sentences later, Castle goes on to proclaim: “Yet that significant achievement gap that I referred to between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers still exists in key subjects...” (U.S. House, Castle, 10 May 2005). Castle first refers to “poor and minority children,” but when discussing the achievement gap he merely notes “disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers.” By first discussing the two groups Castle terms as “minorities and the poor” and then proceeding to use the term “disadvantaged,” the Representative succeeds in lumping minorities and the poor together as a single “disadvantaged” entity. While Castle sidesteps direct reference to race, he ultimately strengthens the perception that to be a minority means that one is a disadvantaged person.

The NCLB website is the other useful forum demonstrating how language reflects problematic attitudes on the part of public officials and in the general American public. The NCLB posts the very statistics quoted in Congress under the link: “Achievement.” Under the “Achievement” link an internet surfer, parent, researcher, or administrator can click on the following: Nation’s Report Card, Nation’s Report Card on African Americans, Nations’ Report Card on Hispanics and three links listing benefits for African Americans, for Hispanics, and for American Indian students. The “Achievement” section lacks a report on both white students and

on Asian students, and more significantly, on “economically disadvantaged students.” NCLB stresses assisting the economically disadvantaged, yet by denying those students a place where their scores are reported, those students who are categorized by race are easily share the encompassing title: disadvantaged.

A summary of the nation’s progress as of April of 2006 found on the NCLB website is as follows: “The National Assessment of Education Progress results show that achievement gaps continue to narrow even as student populations become more diverse” (No Child Left Behind, 2001). While test scores between student populations become increasingly more comparable, the word “even” works to create an underlying sense of low expectations. “Even” implies that test score improvement is particularly impressive because percentages of minority populations are rising in schools. Are minority students likely to bring down overall test scores merely because they are minorities? Is it therefore a “disadvantage” for schools to have minority student populations, particularly when standardized tests measuring Adequate Yearly Progress are now high stakes? On an institutional level as the NCLB website demonstrates, expectations for minorities lag far behind those of white students. If white student populations were rising, would the NCLB website report that the gap was narrowing *even* as white populations increased?

The concept, “to be disadvantaged” implies a defect. To be disadvantaged because one is of color implies that the very race itself is defected. *Webster’s Dictionary* (2001) defines “disadvantage” as “an unfavorable, inferior, or prejudicial condition” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2001). Following this definition, *Webster’s Dictionary* gives the synonym “handicap.” Are we to say that minority students are

“unfavorable” based on a racial disadvantage? The common perception in dominant white U.S. culture is a sense that to be of color translates that one is handicapped. We witness this perception within public schools where minority children represent a disproportionate number of special education students (Harry, 2004, p. 9). Beth Harry (2004) writes in the report *The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Theories and recommendations* published by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in Washington D.C. that special education is used as a means of contending with minority issues. She goes on to use Baltimore City as an example of how Special Education is used to remedy minority issues: “In Baltimore City almost a fifth of all students were placed in special education programs in 1988” (Harry 2004, p. 10). When a student is placed in a special education program, that student becomes not only a disadvantaged student, but a student with a disability. Harry (2004) writes:

The concept of disability essentially reflects the belief that, for whatever reason, there is a deficit within the student: the individual has a condition that is detrimental to his/her overall development, mastery of academic learning, ability to produce language, or to behave in socially acceptable ways (Harry, 2004, p. 10).

If public school systems are labeling minority students as disadvantaged because they are racially “disabled”, Harry (2004) makes an excellent point that the internalization of such labels will ultimately lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, or should we say, a culturally fulfilling prophecy.

Derald Wing Sue and David Sue (2003) provide a case study about a young Black man involved in an inner-racial relationship in the text *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*. John [the young Black man] and Mary [John's white girlfriend] attend couples' counseling. During the counseling, John expresses that he does not see any problems that cannot be overcome in their relationship:

John seems to feel that he has overcome many handicaps in his life and that this [relationship problems] represents just another obstacle to be conquered. When asked about his use of the term 'handicap,' he responds, 'It's not easy to be Black, you know. I've proven to my parents and friends in high school, including myself, that I'm worth something'" (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 216-17).

Essentially John says that despite his "disadvantage" as a Black man he is worth something. Sue and Sue go on to analyze what exactly John is feeling about being Black: "First, he seems to equate his Blackness with a handicap to be overcome. Is it possible that John feels ashamed of who and what he is (Black)?" (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 217). Sue and Sue drive home the fundamental concept of being a person who is considered by society and who considers himself disadvantaged or handicapped:

Constantly bombarded on all sides by reminders that whites and their way of life are superior and that all other lifestyles are inferior, many minorities begin to wonder whether they themselves are not somehow inadequate... (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 218).

The idea of inadequacy and being in some way inherently disadvantaged leads to avoiding direct confrontation that whites are racist perpetrators. Instead, like John, minorities receive the message that they must take the responsibility and “prove” themselves. By avoiding reference to race regardless of how “taboo” it has become in American politics when we discuss the disadvantaged student, politicians maintain a system of oppression by refusing to make a distinction between those students whose parents may struggle financially and minority students who have suffered under white oppression. According to Allan David Freeman (1978) in the article *Legitimizing racial discrimination through antidiscrimination law: A critical review of supreme court doctrine*, to avoid mention of race in a “color-blind” approach denies the history that has resulted in relations between whites and peoples of color. Ultimately, a color-blind approach works to guarantee minority oppression and sends the message that a minority’s social position is due to a “disadvantage” that calls to be overcome by people of color rather than the symptoms of a racist society (Freeman, 1978).

#### Accountability:

In education debates throughout the House and Senate the term “accountability” runs rampant. If the white American public is sending the message that students of color are “racially disadvantaged,” like John had internalized, many may also assume that minority students are those responsible or accountable for proving they are not racially disadvantaged. All K-12 students including both minority and white students face schools held to standards enforced by systems of “accountability.” The idea of accountability runs throughout the conversations, findings, and studies of NCLB and leads us to examine what is meant by the term and

what it implies in the context of minority student populations. According to U.S. Federal Government's NCLB website:

[The Department of Education] promotes accountability for improving student achievement by ensuring that States implement rigorous systems of standards, assessments and accountability that motivate educators to assume responsibility for getting each and every student to achieve at high levels (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

In one sentence the website uses “accountability” twice. Most outlines of accountability throughout the NCLB website and the Department of Education website make clear that educators, schools, and States are responsible for the academic advancement of their students rather than assuming the students themselves are accountable. However, according to researchers Douglas N. Harris and Carolyn D. Herrington (2006) in the piece *Accountability, standards, and the growing achievement gap: Lessons from the past half-century*, the concept of accountability has traditionally been understood to encompass two forms of the term: state accountability and student accountability. In both cases, the very system seeks to establish consequences carried out depending on the academic success or failure of the students themselves as measured by standardized test scores. One of the central ideas of accountability is to address the discrepancy in the education received between minority students and white students. The problem arises when children, particularly minorities ones are asked to take responsibility for their own success or failure. If the government measures accountability by students' scores, minority students, with lower test scores, are vulnerable to a public that may question how

much effort or responsibility they are investing into their own education. If white students can do it, why can't minority students?

In a previously cited quotation by Representative Owens he states: "The achievement gap is narrowing as students in schools are held accountable for their performance" (13 June 2005, House of Representatives). Owens attributes the rise in test scores among students to NCLB's assertion that students in schools are those responsible or accountable. Is it just to ask students themselves to compensate and prove themselves in a culture characterized by racial and educational inequalities? Why don't those students take responsibility and shatter the glass ceiling themselves? Owens asks. Clearly Representative Owens has misinterpreted the concept of accountability as it is laid out in NCLB to mean student accountability rather than school or state accountability. While we rest assured that Owens' comment poorly represents the intended design of accountability, we must ask ourselves how far does this misunderstanding stretch?

If we look instead at struggling schools (held accountable) they are predominantly composed of minority students in low-income neighborhoods. I specifically examine those elementary, middle schools, secondary schools, and high schools located in Region 10 of New York City public schools where I will be teaching. The New York City Teaching Fellows only assigns their fellows to the neediest neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs, thus we can expect that the majority of these schools will consist of students from low-income families. Region 10 includes most of Northern Manhattan and encompasses the Upper West Side, Morningside Heights, Central Harlem, and Washington Heights. The demographics



of these neighborhoods, (apart from the Upper West Side), tend to be comprised of significant Hispanic and Black populations (U.S. Census, 2000). The majority of schools in Region 10 receive Title I funding, indicating that a large percentage of the students qualify as “low income” (New York City Department of Education, 2006). This is also reflected in the high percentage of students receiving federally subsidized free lunch. For example, at Maria Teresa Secondary School, which houses grades six and seven, 100 percent of all students attending are enrolled in the free lunch program. Over half of the students attending Maria Teresa are Hispanic (New York City Department of Education, 2006). Only 33.6 percent of the student body passed the state requirements for NCLB at a proficient level. At Patria Secondary School in Central Harlem, 40.4 percent of the student body is Hispanic, 30 percent is Black, and 15 percent is white. Only 31.7 percent of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders passed the state test at the level NCLB deems proficient for grade level (New York City Department of Education, 2006).

All of the schools’ report cards designate the school’s accountability status. Following the “school accountability status” the report cards list “in good standing” if the school has made the necessary improvements if their students are not “succeeding,” or if the students are meeting the requirements established by NCLB. All of the schools examined fell under “in good standing” despite the apparent incongruence between the overall designation and student scores (New York City Department of Education, 2006). We can attribute the overwhelming positive assessment of the schools as a clear initiative to improve student test scores.

School report cards pair the term “accountability” with “school.” By clearly indicating the acting party the federal government, parents, and the district hold responsible, direct pressure on the students themselves is theoretically relieved. In *Brown v. the Board of Education* “The court added that where a state undertakes to provide public education, it ‘is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms’” (Freeman, 1978, p. 32). Are white schools under the same pressures as minority schools in terms of accountability? According to the provisions set out by NCLB all schools regardless of racial composition must meet identical federal standards; however, schools with high minority populations are already under-funded and lacking the resources white schools enjoy (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Are we asking minority schools to work disproportionately harder than white schools to meet the requirements? By not recognizing the barriers with which minority schools must contend and asking that performance be identical to those students with unlimited resources, accountability is setting up minority students to be blamed when they logically cannot compete with the better funded and superior quality education white students receive on average.

During the initial No Child Left Behind debates in Congress before its 2001 passage, Congress discussed various forms of “accountability”. Accountability may be characterized as a school’s report card, a state’s reading scores compared with other states’ or high stakes accountability, where consequences are implemented when specific goals are not met (No Child Left Behind, 2001). We will define “accountability” here as “The principle that [schools] are held responsible for their actions and may be required to explain them to others [such as to parents, the public,

state education offices, and the federal government]” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2001, p. 28). The U.S. educational system has always adhered to certain standards of accountability, but No Child Left Behind creates a system based almost entirely on high stakes testing which leads us to the term “accountability,” or to those standards by which schools are held.

Accountability is one of the key components of NCLB. In fact, on the NCLB website, the first word that can be searched from a list of pre-established options under the title “quick click” is “accountability.” In addition, on the left side of the website under a list of links, the first link that appears is “stronger accountability.” Both of these lead to webpages with a various articles outlining constructive methods of achieving AYP. Examples of titles include: “Accountability for Schools” and “Standards, Assessment, and Accountability.” Parents searching for accountability measures are led through a number of articles that discuss school report cards, how parents can access school report cards, and how parents can become involved in their children’s schools to positively impact the success of the schools. Accountability seems to be embedded in every discussion relating to NCLB and current education debates, but how it is intrinsically understood is the key issue.

Amongst educators, the term accountability tends to be implemented when discussing the responsibility of school personnel, meaning that educators must hold high expectations of all students regardless of socio-economic or racial backgrounds so that educators and the overseeing government will hold minority students to the same standards as students in more “successful” schools. In the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on June 23, 2004 Paul Vallas Chief Executive Officer

of the School District of Philadelphia testified about the implementation of NCLB at the request of Chairman Boehner and Senior Democratic Member Miller: “There is simply no time to waste when it comes to setting high expectations for our children, providing the needed resources for children to meet these expectations and holding adults responsible for achieving these expectations” (House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Miller, 23 June 2004). Vallas directly links the idea of expectations to accountability. He specifically asserts that adults must be those held accountable and that accountability relies on “resources” that must be channeled into schools to make high expectations feasible. Instead of saying that resources will *help* children to meet high expectations, he makes a causal relation between resources as a necessary component to meeting high expectations, thus removing students from assuming responsibility for a racist society. By acknowledging the responsibility of adults in power, Vallas successfully destroys the underlying perception that minority students should take responsibility for their failing schools.

In the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Kati Haycock of the Education Trust spoke September 29, 2005 on NCLB. Because Haycock is deeply entrenched in the educational system she understands the intent behind accountability in keeping those in power responsible rather than the children themselves. She gives an example of Granger High School in the Yakima Valley in Washington that continues to not make AYP as defined by NCLB. She cites Principal Esparza when he demands, “Hold schools accountable” (House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Haycock, 29 September 2005). Esparza and Haycock understand the importance of holding *schools* accountable, but things become sticky when those

schools failing have high minority populations. Granger High School, a struggling and failing school has a student body comprised of 82 percent Latino students and 6 percent American Indian students (U.S. House, 29 September 2005). Unfortunately, schools with failing test scores are often those schools with high minority populations. It is easy for white America to have the impulse to hold the students in failing schools responsible rather than to examine greater systemic factors at work.

Ultimately, students' test scores determine the success or failure of the school (No Child Left Behind, 2001). It is easy for those in positions of power and the white middle class with "successful children" to look at the test scores of minority students and to assume that those students are those who the state should hold accountable. Rather than turning to those who allocate funding or to those who work in schools, many white Americans may attribute the "problems" of minorities to their failure to take responsibility for their own education. If we look at a cultural deficit theory that has worked to maintain systemic oppression, whites may quickly link low minority test scores to a cultural disability rather than to take responsibility for their part in contributing to a racial underclass. As Derrick Bell Jr. (1995) points out in *Racial realism* whites "can use abstract concepts, such as equality, to mask policy choices and value judgements" (Bell, p. 304). He goes on to cite the breakdown of affirmative action in the case *Regents of the University of California v Bakke* (1978) saying that whites enjoy race-based privilege and do not have to answer to "inadequate public school systems in urban ghettos, lack of minority professionals to serve as role models, and the use of standardized tests evaluated according to white criteria" (Bell, 1995, p. 304). The problem with the term "accountability" is that to avoid ambiguity,

those speaking of accountability must specify who is responsible as Principal Esparza does when he states: “hold *schools* accountable” in order to risk placing arbitrary blame on minority children and alleviating the dominant white culture of liability.

In the Senate on September 13, 2005, Senator Collins and Senator Snowe, white Republicans from Maine proposed “a bill to provide for flexibility and improvements in elementary and secondary education” (U.S. Senate, Snowe, 13 September 2005) in the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Senator Snowe assumed leadership for bill: “Mr. President, I rise today to talk about a bill that gives students, parents and teachers accountability and proficiency standards” (U.S. Senate, Snowe, 13 September 2005). Snowe targets three groups: students, parents, and teachers. She states that the bill would give these three groups accountability standards, yet she places students at the front of the list, parents in the middle, and teachers at the end. By placing students first in a list of those “accountable,” Snowe emphasizes the role of the student over the parents and teachers in meeting accountability standards. Although Snowe opens with student accountability, later in her proposition, she claims:

Our legislation would provide flexibility in the design of state accountability systems to determine adequate yearly progress or AYP. Our legislation would explicitly permit a state to include additional models ‘discussed further below’ in the State” (Congressional Record, 13 September 2006).

In this section, Snowe acknowledges the role the state plays in accountability and pushes her legislation towards state responsibility rather than towards student

responsibility as she originally implied. With the progression of her proposition, it becomes evident that Snowe advocates for state responsibility; however, if she is to avoid ambiguity, any reference to accountability must be carefully articulated so that students are not blamed or held responsible for unsatisfactory academic performance. Bell (1995) writes in *Racial realism* that Blacks will never achieve equality in a racist U.S. environment which makes them particularly vulnerable. He goes on to write: “the practice of using blacks as scapegoats for failed economic or political policies works everytime” (Bell, 1995, p. 307). With some certainty, we can assume that Bell would not be opposed to the inclusion of educational policies alongside economic and political ones due to the related interest. If white America purports to obliterate inequality it must first cease using minorities as scapegoats and push for a basic adequate education for minority students.

Throughout the Congressional Record and across party lines accountability appears to be the most consistently understood term when compared to “narrowing the gap” and “disadvantaged students” despite a few inconsistencies as demonstrated in Owens’ comments. Perhaps the uniformity across party lines, among representatives, and in all levels of Congress to hold schools and school administration accountable as opposed to the students themselves remains almost constant because there is little to no discussion of race in terms of accountability. While the schools that are often under-funded and not making AYP boast high minority populations, racial discussion or illusion to race remains almost entirely absent from discussions on accountability. In fact, there is almost no reference to what demographic attends struggling or failing schools except for the testimony

regarding Granger High School. Although race appears to be absent from discussions about “accountability,” we cannot deny that it does not lie beneath the surface of all education discussion in and out of Congress. If education were equal among the races, there would logically be no need for “accountability” because schools would have the resources and the quality of teachers that ultimately determine academic success across the board, not only in white middle America.



## Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

### Conclusion:

The link between race and the three terms *narrowing the gap*, *disadvantaged students*, and *accountability* definitely exists. The term *disadvantaged students* is perhaps the strongest indicator of how rhetoric can maintain a system of oppression. As politicians avoid specific discussions on race, they succeed only inferring that minorities are in some way “disadvantaged” by their race. This idea of racial disadvantage speaks to a racial deficit theory and works only to maintain racist preconceptions. The term *narrowing the gap* also suggests white retribution which to some degree might undermine its very objective. On the other side, *accountability* is perhaps the weakest of the three in terms of locating a racist connection between holding minority students as opposed to schools accountable. In the majority of references throughout the educational debates where *accountability* was referenced politicians were clear in who should be held accountable: the system, not the students. In this way, we can conclude that the research question was partially affirmed and that yes, racial undertones do exist in these overused words; however, exactly how racist attitudes function through this rhetoric remains somewhat ambiguous. It would be extremely beneficial to expand this study to examine other over-used phrases regarding racial justice outside of the confines of education. What this study does provide is an exercise in building consciousness about language accepted as “politically correct” or “culturally sensitive.”

It is safe to venture that politicians, teachers, and parents are not aware of key words and phrases that work to maintain racism used in “progressive” daily speech.

Allan David Freeman (1978) writes: “the conception of racial discrimination suggests that the problem will not be solved until the conditions associated with it have been eliminated” (Freeman, 1978, p. 29). Freeman (1978) goes on to write that we cannot merely neutralize the inappropriate conduct of the perpetrator, but that we must make decisions that recognize racial marginalization (Freeman, 1978, p. 29). By addressing racism within schools, admitting that school policies mirror attitudes running throughout white dominant culture, and by taking the initiative to be self-critical, white America takes the first steps to breaking down a dangerous and timeless social structure. Combating racism requires a personal commitment. No longer can we only rely on the judicial system to enforce equal rights, but white people have the responsibility to evaluate themselves and the attitudes they perpetuate. Congressional rhetoric often illustrates the most cutting edge politically correct lingo, yet it simultaneously reflects the attitudes of the American constituents keeping their representatives and senators in office. By maintaining close critical watch on what is being said, we take the responsible initiative in raising consciousness.

In the process of reviewing literature and combing Congressional records, a casual summative glance led me to assume that there was a solid connection between the three overused terms and overtly racist rhetoric. I expected politicians to find themselves caught in a web of “politically correct” language that directly pointed to racist attitudes throughout contemporary white U.S. culture. While the three buzzwords hint at something else beneath a mere desire for equality between the races in education, politicians have succeeded in creating a patchy and ambiguous link between overt racism and “politically correct” rhetoric. While we cannot draw on

this study's evidence to cry "racism" in educational rhetoric, it does inspire us to think more analytically about the nature of accepted language. The very language that we use shapes our society and impacts those already vulnerable to cruelty of perception. While *accountability*, *disadvantaged*, and *narrowing the gap* may not point directly to racist undertones, when we think critically about everyday rhetoric we keep ourselves and our society safe from the abyss of the status quo.

While history speaks of a system deeply entrenched in age-old habits, programs are now being established within schools, school districts, states, and within the nation that recognize the experience of people of color as well as programs that address inequality. Non-for-profit organizations have implemented teaching programs such as Teach for America, New York City Teaching Fellows, the Oakland Teaching Fellows, and the D.C. Teaching Fellows to address the issues of "high-need" schools. These programs seek to recruit recent college graduates and professionals searching for social justice work within the educational realm, but who lack teaching credentials. Teach for America seeks specifically to attract recent college graduates who plan to later enter into public policy and advocacy. The New York City Teaching Fellows, on the other hand, searches for those people who are willing to consider making a long-term commitment to teaching in the New York City public school system. Each year the NYC Teaching Fellows conducts an interview process and draws in a 23,000-plus applicant pool for its 3,000 positions (New York City Teaching Fellows, 2006). Similarly, Teach of America typically has 17,000-plus applicants for its 1,500 positions across the U.S. (Teach for America, 2006). These numbers speak to the commitment Americans have made to combat public school inequality.

Increasingly, public school textbooks acknowledge the impact people of color have on the United States. Holidays such as Kwanzaa are slowly being recognized in public schools. It is this awareness of people of color, this celebration of diversity, and this acknowledgement of a history of marginalization, that works toward creating a national environment oiled for change. Each day is a challenge, each faculty meeting is a chance for improvement, and each P.T.A. meeting is an opportunity to be heard. By educating ourselves of the implications found in our attitudes and in our speech, we can work toward breaking down paradigms and moving toward a more progressive future.

Not only are private organizations implementing programs such as the Teaching Fellows and Teach for America, but the U.S. federal government also conducts educational programs such as TRIO that target students from “disadvantaged backgrounds.” According to the TRIO official webpage, these programs “are educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.” Currently, TRIO consists of eight programs including: Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, TRIO dissemination Partnership Program, Training Program for Federal TRIO Program Staff, Upward Bound, and Upward Bound Math-Science. While these programs do not necessarily target minority students, some minority students may fall under the qualifying pre-requisites of low-income, first-generation college students, or students with disabilities.

In another federally funded program GEAR UP, individual states apply for a grant and channel those funds into high-poverty middle schools and high schools in an effort to “increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education” (GEAR UP website). Those states granted funds use the resources to follow an entire cohort of students from sixth or seventh grade through high school. “GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students” (GEAR UP website). While GEAR UP does not necessarily serve minority students in particular, many low-income minority students benefit from this program.

In no way do I seek to “solve” the problem of racism by merely recognizing racist attitudes; however, it is one step toward developing an atmosphere of equality in public schools. For too long, public schools have been the stage for racial injustice and a space to manifest racist ideas. By working toward protecting the children of the United States, we work toward creating a different stage: a stage of positive development. Racism will in all likelihood continue in the lives of our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, but through our efforts, we make slow steps towards a world that offers more equitable opportunities across racial lines.

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